

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus comprising an enclosure adapted to carry multiple dough pieces and defining an enclosed volume to create an environment in which the dough pieces can proof, wherein the enclosure is thermally conductive to allow a temperature in the enclosure to substantially normalize with a temperature outside the enclosure.
2. The apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the enclosure comprises metal.
3. The apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the enclosure comprises plastic.
4. The apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the enclosure comprises trays for supporting each of the respective dough pieces.
5. The apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the enclosure comprises a base having an outer surface and a roller associated with the outer surface to impart mobility to the enclosure.
6. The apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the enclosure comprises at least one partition to separate the enclosed volume into multiple sections.
7. The apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the enclosure comprises a door to provide access to the enclosed volume defined by the enclosure.
8. The apparatus as in claim 7, wherein the enclosure comprises gaskets attached to the door to substantially seal the enclosure.
9. The apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the enclosure is maintained below room temperature.
10. The apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the enclosure is adapted to be received by a thermally-controlled chamber.

11. The apparatus as in claim 10, wherein the enclosure is adapted to be received by a refrigerated chamber.
12. The apparatus as in claim 10, wherein the enclosure is adapted to be received by a heated chamber.

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- ✓ 13. An apparatus for proofing dough, the apparatus comprising:

an enclosure adapted to carry multiple dough pieces and comprised of a thermally conductive material, the enclosure defining an enclosed volume to create an environment in which the dough pieces can proof;

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a tray for carrying each of the respective dough pieces;

a partition to divide the volume into multiple sections; and

a door to provide access to the volume defined by the enclosure;

wherein the enclosure is adapted to be received by a thermally controlled chamber.

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14. A method for proofing dough comprising the steps of:
- thawing frozen dough at a first temperature above 32° F;
 - proofing the thawed dough at a second temperature above 32° F in a substantially enclosed environment; and
 - holding the proofed dough at a third temperature above 32° F in a substantially enclosed environment.
15. The method as in claim 14, wherein the first temperature and the second temperature are approximately equal.
16. The method as in claim 14, wherein the second temperature and the third temperature are approximately equal.
17. The method as in claim 14, wherein the first temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 35°-50° F.
18. The method as in claim 17, wherein the first temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 38°-40° F.
19. The method as in claim 14, wherein the thawing step is maintained for up to approximately 12 hours.
20. The method as in claim 14, wherein the second temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 35°-50° F.
21. The method as in claim 20, wherein the second temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 38°-40° F.
22. The method as in claim 14, wherein the proofing step is maintained for up to approximately 24 hours.

23. The method as in claim 14, wherein the third temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 35°-50° F.
24. The method as in claim 23, wherein the third temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 36°-40° F.
- 5 25. The method as in claim 14, wherein the holding step is maintained for up to approximately 40 hours.
26. The method as in claim 14, wherein the dough comprises a water activity level of between approximately 0.929-0.999.
27. The method as in claim 26, wherein the dough comprises a water activity level of between approximately 0.940-0.980.

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28. A method for proofing dough comprising the steps of:

accelerated thawing of frozen dough at a first temperature between approximately 40°-100° F for approximately 40-240 minutes in a substantially enclosed environment;

proofing thawed dough at a second temperature above 32° F in a substantially enclosed environment; and

holding proofed dough at a third temperature above 32° F in a substantially enclosed environment.
29. The method as in claim 28, wherein the first temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 75°-90° F.
30. The method as in claim 28, wherein the thawing step is maintained for approximately 50-120 minutes.
31. The method as in claim 28, wherein the second temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 35°-50° F.
32. The method as in claim 28, wherein the proofing step is maintained for up to approximately 24 hours.
33. The method as in claim 28, wherein the third temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 35°-50° F.
34. The method as in claim 28, wherein the holding step is maintained for up to approximately 40 hours.
35. The method as in claim 28, wherein the accelerated thawing comprises presetting the temperature of the substantially enclosed environment to the first temperature for approximately 30-60 minutes.

36. The method as in claim 35, wherein the frozen dough is placed into the substantially enclosed environment preset to the first temperature.

37. The method as in claim 28, wherein the proofing comprises presetting the temperature of the substantially enclosed environment to the second temperature.

5 38. The method as in claim 37, wherein the thawed dough is placed into the substantially enclosed environment preset to the second temperature.

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39. A method for proofing dough comprising the steps of:
- thawing frozen dough at a first temperature above 32° F;
 - accelerated proofing of thawed dough at a second temperature between approximately 40°-100° F for approximately 40-240 minutes in a substantially enclosed environment; and
 - holding proofed dough at a third temperature above 32° F in a substantially enclosed environment.
40. The method as in claim 39, wherein the first temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 35°-50° F.
41. The method as in claim 39, wherein the thawing step is maintained for up to approximately 12 hours.
42. The method as in claim 39, wherein the second temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 75°-90° F.
43. The method as in claim 39, wherein the proofing step is maintained for approximately 50-120 minutes.
44. The method as in claim 39, wherein the third temperature comprises a temperature between approximately 35°-50° F.
45. The method as in claim 39, wherein the holding step is maintained for up to approximately 40 hours.
46. The method as in claim 39, wherein the accelerated proofing comprises presetting the temperature of the substantially enclosed environment to the second temperature for approximately 30-60 minutes.

47. The method as in claim 46, wherein the thawed dough is placed into the substantially enclosed environment preset to the second temperature.

48. The method as in claim 39, wherein the holding comprises presetting the temperature of the substantially enclosed environment to the third temperature.

5 49. The method as in claim 48, wherein the proofed dough is placed into the substantially enclosed environment preset to the third temperature.

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